

Informational Letter #0001-2003

Clarification of Sexually Oriented Business

Sexually Oriented Business (SOB) is not a true SOB unless registered with Vice. Sign Criteria as outlined in Ordinance #83-1812

- I. **Primary Sign** shall have no more than two (2) display surfaces. It could be a wall sign if they so choose.
 - No flashing lights.
 - Be on a flat plane, rectangular in shape.
 - Not exceed 75 square feet in area.
 - Not exceed 10 feet in overall height.
 - Not exceed 10 feet in overall length.
 - Can not contain photographs, silhouettes, drawings or pictorial representations of any type whatsoever.
 - Each letter forming a word on a primary sign shall be of a solid color and each such letter shall be the same print-type, size and color. The background behind such lettering on the display surface of a primary sign shall be of a uniform and solid color.
 - May contain the name of the establishment and or one or more of the following:
 - Adult Bookstore
 - Adult Movie Theatre.
 - Primary Signs for Adult Movie Theatres may contain the additional phrase, "Movie Titles Posted on Premise"
 - Adult Encounter Parlor
 - Adult Cabaret
 - Adult Novelties
 - Adult Entertainment
 - Massage Establishment
- II. **Secondary Sign** shall have only one (1) display surface and shall:
 - Be a flat plane, rectangular in shape
 - Not exceed 20 square feet in area
 - Not exceed five (5) feet in height and four (4) feet in width
 - Be affixed or attached to any wall or door of the establishment
- III. **SOB Plaza Sign.** To qualify as a Plaza, it must have 3 separate businesses, each having their own entrance door and Certificate of Occupancy. The sign is then considered as qualifying and must meet the regular requirements of the Sign Code and not the SOB Ordinance.

INFORMATIONAL LETTER #0002-2003

NOTICE

FEE INCREASE

EFFECTIVE JANUARY 12, 2004

	NEW RATE	OLD RATE
Meter Loop and Service.....	\$12.00	\$10.00
Up to and including 50 kW.....	\$20.00	\$15.00
Over 250 kW.....	\$30.00	\$25.00
Shop Inspection (0 to 5 kVA)	\$30.00	\$25.00
Installation Inspection (0 to 5 kVA).....	\$30.00	\$25.00
Reconnect (used when Centerpoint/Reliant is involved)...	\$20.00	\$15.00
Site Inspection.....	\$60.00	\$59.00

All other fees remain status quo

Informational Letter #0003-2004

Awnings

Effective April 5, 2004

Sign Code: Section 4603 Classifications: Awning Sign shall mean any sign constructed of a fabric type material stretched over a rigid metal frame that is attached to the wall, roof or mansard of a building. Such signs shall be classified as wall signs.

International Building Code 2000: Section 3105.2. Design and Construction: Awnings and canopies shall be designed and constructed to withstand wind or other lateral loads and live loads as required by Chapter 16 with due allowance for shape, open construction and similar features that relieve the pressure or loads. Structural members shall be protected to prevent deterioration. Awnings shall have frames of non-combustible material, fire-retardant-treated wood, wood of Type IV sizes, or 1-hour construction with combustible covers and shall be either fixed, retractable, folding or collapsible.

This requirement standardizes the Sign Administration plan checking process to that of Commercial plan checking.

Effective April 5, 2004 all new awning signs must be engineered. A re-cover or re-skin of an existing awning structure will not need engineering if it can be shown that it was previously permitted.

Any attachment that has a secondary purpose, protrudes more than 18 inches and is located within the building setback lines must first obtain approval from the Planning and Development Platting Group prior to obtaining a sign permit.

An awning with no sign message, must obtain a permit through Commercial plan review.

Informational Letter #0004-2004

Canopy

Effective April 5, 2004

CODE REFERENCES:

Sign Code. Section 4603. Marquee shall mean a sign attached to or hung from a canopy or covered structure projecting from and supported by a frame or pipe support extending beyond a building.

International Building Code 2000. Chapter 2 Definitions. Canopy: An architectural projection that provides weather protection, identity or decoration and is supported by the building to which it is attached and at the outer end by not less than one stanchion. A canopy is comprised of a rigid structure over which a covering is attached.

International Building Code 2000: Section 3105.2. Awnings and canopies shall be designed and constructed to withstand wind or other lateral loads and live loads as required by Chapter 16 with due allowance for shape, open construction and similar features that relieve the pressure or loads. Structural members shall be protected to prevent deterioration. Awnings shall have frames of non-combustible material, fire-retardant-treated wood, wood of Type IV sizes, or 1-hour construction with combustible covers and shall be either fixed, retractable, folding or collapsible.

Sign Code. Section 4605(13). Signs not exceeding 200 square feet that are painted on the face of a building no higher than the roof line and that form an integral part of a canopy or marquee entrance and state only the street number, name of the proprietor and the name of the premises therein, provided that the number of such signs shall not exceed the number of vehicular entrances for such premises, and provided, further, that such signs shall be counted as marquee signs for purposes of Section 4611(b)(1).

International Building Code 2000: Chapter 2 Definitions. Marquee. A permanent roofed structure attached to and supported by the building and that projects into the public right-of-way.

POLICY CLARIFICATION:

A building permit must first be secured for a canopy prior to issuance of a sign permit. You must provide a copy of the building permit along with your sign permit application and design drawings. Sign Administration will not charge a construction permit when a building permit has been issued.

Signs on an entrance canopy that protrudes over the city right-of-way shall be classified as marquee signs and must comply with Section 4605(13) in order to be considered exempt from sign permits. A building permit however is still required.

Signs placed on a gasoline canopy are to be classified as wall signs. The canopy wall signs may continue to have more than one (1) face in keeping with previous policies.

INFORMATIONAL LETTER # 0005-2004

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

Many of you design original sign graphics for prospective customers. After the bid process is complete, the potential customer may like your design but choose another sign company to manufacture the sign.

When permitting a job for another sign company, if that company's title block appears on the print indicating the contents are copyrighted or may not be reproduced, you must obtain a letter from that sign company authorizing you to use the drawings. The letter of authorization must be address specific.

As you may know, State law protects engineering and architectural drawings from being reproduced without permission, and Federal law protects authors, publications, artistic work, etc. This also applies to the design you have produced, and we all must follow the rules as set forth by the U.S. Copyright Act.

Informational Letter #0006-2004

Clarification Of Sign Permit Effectiveness

Policy Amplification: Any permit for the construction of a sign shall become null and void unless all construction of the sign is completed within 180 calendar days or the permit is renewed for an additional 180 days.

The renewal/extension of a sign permit must occur before the permit has actually expired, in which case an additional fee equal to one-half the original fee paid will be charged. The proposed sign shall meet all requirements of Chapter 46 on the date the extension is being requested. You do not have to submit all new paperwork but you will need a new application.

If the sign permit has expired, new paperwork must be submitted. This includes the application, drawings, land surveys, etc. The proposed sign shall meet all requirements of Chapter 46 in effect at the new submittal date.

INFORMATIONAL LETTER # 0007-2004

Footing/Foundation Certification Program

Effective December 20, 2004

The Footing and Foundation Certification Program has been enacted to allow for a footing to be drilled, inspected and certified by you the sign contractor and the sign owner. To name a few advantages, the program will allow the sign industry to install ground type signs on the weekend, schedule concrete, etc. without the City of Houston having to inspect. This program however, will not be for signs and drawings that are engineered or required to be engineered unless *the engineer of record performs the required inspection and accepts the work. The engineer of record would have to provide to the City of Houston, Code Enforcement Division, Sign Administration Group a letter certifying the footing and sign installation; sign, date and seal the letter.*

Guidelines:

1. When applying for the permit, notify/advise plan checker that you will be conducting a footing/foundation self-certification so the drawings may be properly stamped. It will be your responsibility to insure the drawings are properly noted that you will be participating in the program.
2. If your sign design is engineered and it is your intent to have the engineer of record certify the footing, you are required to notify the plan checker.
3. If you decide to participate in the certification program after the plan check has occurred, then you must apply for a plan re-exam in order to participate.
4. The **original** Footing/Foundation Certification Form must be received before 180 days so the inspector may verify and place the tag on the sign as required by Code.
5. Attach copy of the concrete receipt to the **original** certification form. Sign permit address, date and concrete company name must be on the concrete receipt. If bagged concrete is used, provide copy of receipt. The receipt must show number of bags and date purchased.
6. A copy of the certification form will not be accepted. A fax copy with an assurance to forward original will not be acceptable.
7. If the **original** form is not received **before** the 180 days, a warning notice for removal of the sign will be issued to the business and the sign company after the 180 days. In effect, the permit is expired. Section 4605(h) in part states that construction of a sign shall become null and void unless construction is completed within 180 days. This certification form has in affect become a part of the construction process. It is strongly recommended that the certification form be submitted immediately upon the footing/foundation being conducted so it will be fresh and current on everyone's mind.
8. Failure to comply will result in both sign owner and sign company receiving a warning notice to remove the sign. If within the designated timeframe, compliance has not been achieved, then citations will be issued each day until rectified. A hearing to revoke your sign contractor's license may also result.
9. If the sign company/contractor receives 3 warning notices for not complying with this procedure, you will not be allowed to continue participation in this program (3 strikes and you're out).
10. It is suggested that when you turn the original in to our office, you obtain the initials or signature of the person accepting the original. If the original certification form is not completed, it will be returned unprocessed.

This procedure supercedes all other certification programs and there is not a fee associated with this program. We want to encourage you to participate in the certification program when possible as it will allow for efficient scheduling for you and will allow our inspectors additional time for enforcement. Together, we can achieve positive results and we believe this is a win, win policy and procedure for all.

Information Letter # 0008-2004

“One Stop” Plan Review For Face Change on Ground Signs

Effective December 27, 2004

In an effort to expedite the permitting process for a face change on an existing ground sign, a licensed sign contractor may utilize the “*One Stop*” permitting program.

The newly created *One Stop* permitting program is set-up to allow the licensed sign contractor to obtain the required permit(s) while with the plan checker. The “site inspection” that was normally done before the permit was issued, will now be conducted after the face change is permitted and installed.

If the permitted site location is in compliance, the inspector will place the identification tag on or near the existing ground sign. If the site is not in compliance, a removal notice will be issued to the business, licensed sign contractor or both.

It is imperative that the licensed sign contractor provide clear and precise elevation drawing depicting the existing location of the ground sign and site/plot plan that shows:

- Two closest intersecting streets
- North arrow
- Building elevations and footprint of the building
 1. Indicate location of any existing signs that are to remain.
 2. Indicate location of signs that are being removed.
 3. Indicate location of ground sign that the face change is being done on.
 - Match up sign(s) shown on application with sign drawings and location/elevation on building.
Example: Sign “A” must be depicted or indicated on the sign drawings and elevation drawing.
- It is imperative to show all signs (new and old) to ensure the sign count has not been exceeded.
- Locate the tag number or project number of the existing ground sign.
 1. If you are unable to locate the tag, and the sign can not be readily located in the computer, the sign will not qualify for this program as the sign must first be identified. This may mean the plan checker may have to do a broad search and we do not want to cause customers to back up in plan checking. It may also mean you, as the sign company will also have to do additional research.
 2. Provide 2 complete set of drawings (no change to existing policy).
- New elements or cabinets added to the existing ground sign do not qualify for this program. For example: Adding channel letters to a flex, plex or aluminum face, etc. as this requires engineered drawings and a land survey.
- “Refurbs” will not be allowed to make use of this program.

If all documents are in order, the plan checker will complete all required computer work, accept payment, and issue the permit or will direct you to the designated account clerk. No more than 2 locations will be accepted at a time.

If adequate drawings are not provided or the tenant does not have a Certificate of Occupancy, you will be denied and the plan checker will inform you of the deficiencies. The plan checker will not be authorized to hold any rejected or denied paperwork waiting for you to resubmit.

The *One Stop* program may continue to be conducted in conjunction with the Fax and Drop Off Programs; however, these will be done based in order received and may not be completed on the same day received. Priority will be given to those customers who come in to the office. As a reminder, money must be maintained in your APA Account in order to use the Fax or Drop Off Programs.

In an effort to provide accurate, prompt and quality service, Sign Administration staff requests that contractors provide their own due diligence in determining if a street is in the city limits by purchasing a Key Map or view HCAD. The Sign Code may now be viewed on-line. In the near future, Major Thoroughfares and Scenic Districts will be able to be viewed on our Web Page. We will place a notice in plan checking when it becomes available on-line.

Sign Administration
Informational Letter 0009-2005
Footing/Foundation Fee Policy
Effective December 1, 2005

There are now over 200 licensed sign companies doing business in Houston and over the years, Sign Administration has made every effort to accommodate and be flexible for your scheduled footing inspection time.

Procedurally, sign companies call in the day before for a specific time frame. However, what is becoming an all too frequent occurrence, we will receive a phone call 5 to 30 minutes before the actual inspection time, indicating it needs to be rescheduled for some other time most often on that same day. This has become problematic for our inspectors and unfair to those sign companies who are on schedule with their inspection time.

In addition, if a representative of your company calls to cancel the footing inspection altogether for that day, your reservation or time slot is considered forfeited. If you call back later in the day to reclaim that time, a "reschedule" will be necessary by a Specially Requested Inspection or Emergency Inspection.

Therefore, effective December 1, 2005, there will be a Re-inspection Fee or Specially Requested Inspection Fee or Emergency Inspection Fee assessed as follows:

Section 117.1.5. Re-Inspection Fee will be assessed in the amount of \$30.00 if the footing is not ready within 30 minutes of the scheduled time or is rescheduled for another day.

Section 117.1.6. Specially Requested Inspection Fee will be assessed in the amount of \$205.00 if the footing inspection requested is still wanted by the sign company the same day but outside of the 30 minute window as outlined under Re-inspection Fee above.

Section 117.1.7. Emergency Inspection Fee will be assessed in the amount of \$245.00 if the footing inspection causes the inspector to work after their normal work schedule.

The Emergency Inspection Fee may also be used if you want an inspection to take place outside our normal business hours or on weekends.

A representative from your company will be notified of any additional fees. One of the above fees that best meet the requirements mentioned above must have acknowledgment or acceptance from a representative of your company prior to the fee being debited or withdrawn from your APA account. If there is no money in your account, then a hold will be placed on your license until paid and a removal notice may be issued to the business if not paid within 7 business days.

Most importantly, our office wants to provide on time and quality inspections. Further, we want to assist and be flexible to accommodate the sign industry without interrupting other inspections. In addition, we would like to encourage you to consider participation in the Footing Certification Program that has been in effect since December 20, 2004.

Sign Administration Informational Letter 0010-05

Footing Inspection Procedure
Effective January 1, 2006

As we all know, there are many more new companies that have joined the Houston family of licensed sign companies. As such, we need to insure that all companies understand the expectations, requirements, and procedures of a footing inspection. This procedure will not have an effect on those who have elected to participate in the Footing Certification Program as outlined in Informational Letter 0007-04. **Please pay particular attention to item “D” below, as it is a significant change.** In addition, this procedure will outline the requirements for the most common type of footing and the materials that are required to be on the job site (reference item “E”)

I. Standard Footing Inspection Requirements.

- A. Site inspection must have been approved for the proposed location of the ground sign and a permit issued.
- B. Section 4606(g) states that vehicles used by employees in connection with installing, erecting and maintaining signs shall have company name and license number. If you have contracted with a sub-contractor to perform the drilling, as the permit holder, you are required to have a representative present.
- C. The sign company is required to call Sign Administration no later than 4:30p.m. the day before. For example, if you want a Monday inspection, you must call the inspection in on Friday unless you choose a same day or overtime inspection (reference Information Letter 0009-2005 for type and fees).
 - 1. When calling in, be prepared to provide the following:
 - a. Permit address (location of sign).
 - b. Project number (permit number).
 - c. Time of the footing inspection (this is the time the drilling of the footing is complete).
 - d. Name of contact person and phone number. This person should be the person who we may call the following morning in case the time should need to be adjusted.
 - e. It would be helpful, if you also called the following morning to confirm the time with the inspector.
- D. **You (the sign company) will be required to have the original approved drawings, site sheet and permit at the permitted location also referred to as the job site.** Sign Administration will no longer bring the office copy to the job site. This is in line with the other construction trades.
 - 1. Footing/hole must be located in the pre-approved location as shown on site sheet provided with the permit. If you dispute the site/sign location indicated on the site sheet as performed by the inspector, it is your responsibility to consult with the plan checker, supervisor or call the inspector to discuss. Do not assume you may drill where you have proposed. A plan re-exam and site re-inspection may be required. This is one of the reasons it is imperative that you provide a location with fixed dimensions on your site plan or land survey.

- E. Common footing types and requirements of material to be on job site:
1. Direct Embedment or Direct Burial foundation for **non-staged** sign.
 - a. Pipe, post, I-beam, tube, etc. Required to be on site. These will be measured and matched to the approved drawings.
 2. Direct Embedment or Direct Burial foundation for **staged** sign.
 - a. First stage of pipe or material shown on approved drawing is required to be on site, will be measured and matched to approved drawing.
 3. Anchor Bolt foundation.
 - a. Rebar is required on site and will be measured to approved drawings.
 - b. If using a caged rebar design, it will be measured and must be assembled as per approved engineer drawing.
- NOTE:** Since all staged structures and anchor bolt foundations are required to be engineered, the engineer and sign company will be responsible for the remaining stages of the structure. You, the sign industry, have indicated the remaining stages go up after the concrete has cured and as such requires the remaining stages, if required to be on site, would create a hardship and traffic congestion in smaller parking lots. Sign Administration cannot be responsible or liable for material not inspected. You will not be penalized for not having the other stages on site but you and the engineer will assume all liability with the entire sign structure.
- F. If all aspects of location and footing appear to meet the approved requirements, the footing will be approved and the inspector will sign off on your copy of the permit.

II. Delays.

The primary purpose of the following is to discourage those who have a history of delays but in order to put a procedure in effect; it must be across the board to all contractors.

Sign Administration fully understands that delays may occur during the course of drilling from equipment failure to that of drilling into some type of utility line. However, these delays have a trickle down effect to other scheduled inspections or to other required work production. Therefore, the following shall become effective January 1, 2006.

- A. Delay of 15 minutes but less than 30 minutes, will result in a \$35.00 re-inspection fee being required. (Reference Informational Letter 0009-05)
- B. Delay of 31 minutes or more will result in a \$205.00 being assessed. (Reference Informational Letter 0009-05)
- C. You also have the option of an overtime inspection. (Reference Informational Letter 0009-05)
- D. If you have a delay of greater than 15 minutes, you always have the option of canceling and rescheduling for the next business day. This is a \$35.00 re-inspection fee.
- E. Other delays such as a change in material, depth of footing/hole, sign location, no representative on site, etc.
 1. If there is any change whatsoever from the approved drawings, a plan re-exam is required. If the change includes pipe or footing on non-engineered drawing, this may be conducted over the telephone with revised drawings being submitted within 24 hours.
 2. If the change is to an engineered drawing, we will not be able to conduct the changes over the telephone unless the engineer of record calls to speak with a plan checker or supervisor. The engineer must then submit the correction within 48 hours.

3. Failure to comply with the above procedure will result in the contractor and business being issued a removal notice. Repeat offenders also run the risk of losing their contractor's license.

This procedure is to standardize the way we do business in Houston. Our office takes pride in the service we have provided the industry over the years and the industry has really grown which has placed an undue hardship on the inspection staff when delays occur therefore we are unable to accommodate the way we did in years past. This should also serve as a tool to discourage the sign company from making a change after approved drawings have been issued and not submitting for a plan re-exam or site re-inspection. We sincerely hope this procedure will enlighten and inform you of the footing requirements and hope you will join us to provide a better and consistent inspection.